

## 1.

In the Name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful!

A little over eighteen months ago I was approached online by a very learned Shi'i Muslim from Lebanon I had met on a facebook academic Shi'i Studies list who was interested in my own Corbinian Shi'i Traditionalism but more especially in my approach to entheogens, specifically with DMT, Ayahuasca and Haoma, and its ritual use in an esoteric Shi'i Islamic context. After some initial discussion, my friend proposed that he begin a formal dialogue with the most senior representatives of the orthodox Shi'i ecclesiastical establishment in order to see whether we could obtain some kind of statement, or, even better, a formal legal opinion or ruling (a *fatwa*) by someone senior within that establishment. We were specifically interested in ascertaining precisely where the halls of exoteric Shi'i orthodoxy would ultimately stand on the issue on purely jurisprudential grounds, since, at least in Shi'ism (and this may surprise many people), the sources – and especially the traditions or narrations attributed to the Shi'i Imams (i.e. *akhbār*, *riwāyāt*, *ḥadīth*) which form one of the main, central theoretical sources of this jurisprudence – are quite equivocal and even in a few cases encouraging.

To make a long story short, after well over a year and a half of back and forth discussions and correspondences between my friend (and one other individual) with the office of Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Mohammad Sadeq Hussaini Rohani in Qom, Iran < <http://www.emamrohani.net>>; in mid March 2014, via email, the Grand Ayatollah issued a formal legal ruling (that is, a *fatwa*) determining the use of entheogens and psychoactive substances to be licit and thus permissible (*ḥalāl*) for Shi'i Muslims provided it be under the direction and supervision of qualified experts (*ahl al-ikhtisās*), and that, moreover, such plant substances as a rule do not impair the mind. In the final missive before the decision, the questioner specifically underscored the issue of the visionary component of these plants, where people have reported visions of paradise and hell, and Grand Ayatollah Rohani's *fatwa* finds no objections here either. Note that there are no exact specifications, or any lists given, in Grand Ayatollah Rohani's *fatwa* as to which entheogens and psychoactive substances are meant to be included in the ruling and which ones are deemed to be excluded, albeit, as noted, my own discussion with the interlocutor began around the subjects of DMT, Ayahuasca and Haoma, and peripherally psilocybin mushrooms, cannabis and LSD as well (Ibogaine was also briefly mentioned in one discussion).

I had no direct role in the actual correspondence with Grand Ayatollah Rohani and his office, but I was approached several times during the course of these months for further input and clarifications by my friend and one other person. I was, however, kept abreast of developments during that period.

Now, I should underscore the fact that Grand Ayatollah Rohani is considered to be a *source of emulation* (*marja' al-taqlīd*), which is the highest rank a religious jurisprudent in Twelver Shi'ism can attain. There are only ever a handful of these, so his rank is the highest one can go.

During the course of the eighteen month dialogue, not a stone was left unturned by the Grand Ayatollah and his interlocutors, and he asked countless very pointed and precise questions, and in turn he was answered very precisely and with copious quotations, citations, clarifications and elaborations provided to him from Western

academic source material (which were all very carefully translated for him into Arabic). These included Benny Shanon's *The Antipodes of the Mind* (Oxford: 2002) as well as numerous articles from MAPS, selections from various other academic monographs, assorted published and unpublished anecdotal material, not to mention a plethora of online sources. To the best of our determination, during the course of this correspondence, the Grand Ayatollah became quite well acquainted with the issues involved, and in as much detail as could be given him during that time frame. Medical, pharmacological, neurological, ethnobotanical, legal, scriptural, theological, philosophical and, as mentioned, visionary (so esoteric and *noetic*) topics were all broached with him one by one, and in depth, so his final decision as a high Shi'i Muslim cleric and jurisprudent was as the result of a sound and well-informed overall grounding on most facets of the question.

That said, this ruling by Grand Ayatollah Rohani I personally find to be quite historically momentous and with its significance wide ranging, offering quite positive future ramifications beyond even the world of Shi'i Muslims. More importantly, from an orthodox Shi'i establishment figure such as he, his is a refreshingly open minded display and a poignant contrast to the closed-minded, nonsensical and totally obscurantist Islam of the Ṭālibān, the Wahhabīs of Saudi Arabia and their assorted worldwide Salafī cohorts who would never dream of offering such a ruling under any context or circumstances whatsoever. Nor, for that matter, could one conceive of something like this appearing even from within mainstream orthodox Sunnī Islam or even among the Sunnī Sufī orders. Because the scope of *ijtihād* (broad, independent legal reasoning) is far, far narrower in Sunnī jurisprudence than it is with its Shi'i counterpart, the possibilities of a similar ruling such as this appearing there, at least any time soon, are indeed quite remote. In my humble opinion, this ruling is only possible within a Shi'i context and from a Twelver Shi'i jurisprudent such as Grand Ayatollah Rohani. It is also the very first instance that I am aware of that a senior exoteric and orthodox religious figure of any major Tradition or religious establishment anywhere in the world has addressed this topic directly and found in its favour. The equivalent to Grand Ayatollah Rohani's ruling in an analogous Western context would be for the Vatican to make a similar finding for Roman Catholics. Indeed this is how big this is, and so, as a singular development, it should not be taken lightly or underestimated by anyone.

Furthermore, while Western governments and legal establishments continue to grapple with some of the most rudimentary issues surrounding legalization (which should optimally be outright *decriminalization*) of marijuana; and while churches, individuals and groups who use Ayahuasca, Haoma, mushrooms, DMT, Ibogaine, LSD or cannabis in a sacramental and traditional (holisitic) medicinal setting continue to be persecuted by governments and legal establishments in the West with their sometimes utterly ridiculous, draconian scheduling regimes; and while the so-called 'war on drugs' (which is literally the 'war on plants') rages on in the West, depleting everyone's resources in the process, whilst ignorantly lumping everyone into the same camp and unjustly victimizing many innocents for no ostensible purpose; one of the highest religious and legal authorities in Twelver Shi'i Islam in Iran has positively weighed in on the debate, made all the correct distinctions between 'drugs' and 'psychoactive substances/entheogens' in the process (not to mention the distinction between trippers and those who approach these plants as sacraments), and thus made a learned decision and offered a legal ruling affirmatively on our side.

As far as I am concerned, this *fatwa* changes the whole configuration and contours of the global debate about entheogens and religious freedom and directs it into a much more fertile, nuanced and positive direction from this point forward. If some people in the West may find this positive jurisprudential ruling by a major Iranian Shi‘i Muslim cleric problematic to their attempted lobbying of their own authorities in the West; as if this instance would somehow hurt or otherwise discredit their own cause because it is coming from an Islamic source in Iran; then they need to seriously examine their own personal and cultural motivations (not to mention, biases) on the question, because the complex implications of this decision produces nothing but good for the long term best interests of the whole cause. Why do I say this? Well, for starters, show me one preeminent religious or even a secular political figure anywhere else in the world recently that has done anything remotely similar to this? The Spirit does indeed work in mysterious ways, and the whole plant community worldwide needs to take this on board now, thereby making of this specific instance a precedent everyone can rally around, because a powerful ally has emerged from the most unlikely of quarters: the seat of ecclesiastical Twelver Shi‘i Islamic religious learning and power in Qom, Iran. The hand of the *Madre*, which for us Shi‘i Muslims is none other than *Fāṭima Zahrā’* herself (*viz.* the daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad whom we venerate as a divine, cosmic force), is evidently at work here.

## 2.

Look at Iranian Islamic art and architecture. Look at the domes, porticos, arches and the intricate patterns, mosaic designs and tiling of the various mosques and classical pre-modern buildings, especially those found in Isfahān, Shīrāz or the holy cities of Qom and Mashhad. Even if you cannot find immediate entheogenic references to map out a material causality as such, anyone with enough personal experience of the visionary worlds and landscapes that entheogens opens one up to knows immediately that Iranian Islamic art and architecture (even if such stylistic fusions were born within a distinctly medieval Iranian Islamic historical point of reference) are directly inspired from exactly those vistas of the same visionary topographies – or, as Henry Corbin phrased it, from the same *geosophical* origins. Now go to the *I Ching-esque* poetic couplettes, the *ghazals*, of Khwajah Muḥammad Shamsuddīn Ḥāfiẓ of Shīrāz (d. 1389/90), known to Iranians as the ‘*Tongue of the Unseen*’ (*lisān-i-ghayb*), and, yes, *taste* the leaven of its wisdom and *smell* the fragrance of its sapience and see for yourself where it carries you.

Iranians know the *geosophical* topographies of the *Imaginal World* (‘*ālam al-mithāl*’), the *mundus imaginalis* (which is not a realm of fantasy or make believe, mind you, but the realms) ‘*where bodies are spiritualized and spirits corporealized*’; the locus and *situs* where prophets and holy men of all Traditions receive their visions and inspirations; because it is part and parcel of our Traditional high, spiritual culture that we are literally (voluntarily or involuntarily) initiated into from the moment of birth. It is in the poetry and sacred literature we are taught from a young age. It is in the colours, shapes, smells and sounds that surround us and nurture us since we were small babies. It is in the air we breathe, in the waters that purify us, in the earth we walk upon and in the fire we have looked upon since distant antiquity as a sacred element and a sign of God on earth as taught to us by the Prophet Zarathushtra. It is also replete within the foods we eat daily and in the most abundant herb, the most sacred incense of them all in Iran, namely, *Esfand* or Syrian Rue (i.e. *harmall/peganum harmala*).

The Persian name of this herb, *Esfand*, is derived from the Zoroastrian name of the Archangel of the Earth *Esfandmorz* (Avestan *Spendarmat* or *Spenta Armaiti*, meaning *Holy* or *Beneficent Devotion*), who is specifically female and one of the six Mazdaean Holy Immortals (i.e. the archangelic hypostases of Ahura Mazda, the Godhead). The final Persian month of every Iranian calendar year, *Esfand* (located between mid-February to mid-March), is also named after this Zoroastrian Archangel of the Earth whose theurgy this plant is held to be. So in the *Imaginal*, sacred consciousness of a Traditional Iranian, the earth, a specific plant (viz. *peganum harmala*), time itself and a telluric archangelic hypostasis converge into a single theophanic continuum, and this in itself is an entheogenic, not to mention a shamanic, consciousness *par excellence*, and what Henry Corbin means by *geosophy*; this, especially when such a consciousness beholds the telluric earth in its visionary transfiguration and theophanic apparition as a facet or layer of the Celestial Earth, the Angel. People who have had profound visionary experiences during the height of an entheogenic experience while deep within Nature know exactly what this means, since all high entheogenic visions are really visions of the Celestial Earth and its beings (i.e. *Aryana Vaeja*, *Hyperborea*, what the Iranian Islamic sages have denoted as *Hūrqalyā* and nowheresville, *nā kojā abād*), as entheogens imbue one with those *eyes of fire* which can penetrate beyond the mundane. Henry Corbin also knew it when in the 1920s of the last century he had his own visionary opening by the lakeside in the Black Forests of Germany when he beheld the lake, the sky and the forest transfigure and appear before him in the image, the celestial theophany, of the Earth-Angel-Woman. In the acme of such visions, to paraphrase *Qur'ān* 53:11, the heart does not lie regarding what it sees.

Now in their quite erudite scholarly monograph, *Haoma and Harmaline* (Los Angeles: 1989), David S. Flattery and Martin Schwartz correctly identified the pedigree of the ancient Iranian *Haoma*, or at least one of its main constituents, with *Esfand*, the Syrian Rue. This fact was already known in Iran and the *Persianate* world in general long before Flattery and Schwartz undertook their learned study, being that its identity is quite explicit in much of the medieval Avestan commentaries on *Haoma*; but for some reason Western academic scholarship, speculating and trying to pinpoint the identity of the Vedic *Soma*, first mistakenly identified it with the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom (Gordon Wasson) and then later with Ephedrine (John Brough). Poignantly in chapter two of their study, Flattery and Schwartz draw the direct parallels between the ancient Iranian *Haoma* and Ayahuasca ( see §38-§42, pp. 24-9). In the contemporary Ayahuasca versus analogue debates, this study and the detailed insights it offers, plus the evidence from ancient Avestan texts and scriptures presented in it, has been virtually ignored by some in the community, and mainly by some Western *ayahuasqueros*. To my mind, at least, this significantly complicates the Ayahuasca-only fundamentalism of some in this community while dismissing many of their objections as well. That aside, and a point not discussed by Flattery and Schwartz in any depth, is that Iran also has all kinds of tryptamine plant species, such as Acacia as well as *Mimosa hostilis* (the latter particularly in the northern Caspian provinces), to name just two. So as Flattery and Schwartz have demonstrated in recent academic literature, and as both ancient Iranians and Iranians of the Islamic period have known; not to mention the taxonomic botanical evidence of tryptamine plant species existing in Iran; similar circumstances as well as attitudes obviously prevailed in segments of this culture regarding entheogenic plants quite similar to the Amazonian one, at least where *Haoma* is concerned anyway.

As far as the evidence in the Islamic period is concerned: in his monumental 110 volume collection of Islamic traditions and narrations attributed to the holy Islamic figures (i.e. the Prophet Muḥammad and the holy Imāms), and entitled *The Oceans of the Lights* (*biḥār al-anwār*), the Safavid narrator-traditionist and polymath Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1659) devotes an entire chapter of his 59<sup>th</sup> volume to the sayings of the Islamic holy figures regarding both the Syrian Rue and Olibanum (frankincense). Let me quote four of these here:

The Messenger of God [i.e. the Prophet Muḥammad] said: *the ḥarmal* [i.e. Syrian Rue/Esfand] *does not grow, whether from a tree, a leaf or a fruit, without there being an angelic guardian spirit attached to it, until it reaches whosoever it reaches, or turns to waste. In both its root and its branches there is a talisman. In its seeds there is a cure for seventy-two maladies, so treat yourselves with it, as well as with the olibanum* [i.e. frankincense], *for purposes of healing.*

Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq [the sixth Shi‘i Imām] was asked about the ḥarmal... He said: *As for the ḥarmal, not a single of one of its roots penetrates the earth or any branch of it rises to the sky without there being attached to it an angelic guardian spirit, until it turns to waste or becomes whatever it becomes. The devil avoids the house that contains the ḥarmal from every seventy houses that he passes, and it is a cure for seventy maladies the least which is leprosy. Do not avoid it!*

*One of the prophets lamented to God, mighty and majestic, regarding the cowardice of his people, to which God, mighty and majestic, revealed to him: Command your people to eat the ḥarmal. And in another tradition, it is related: Command them to water the ḥarmal, for it increases a man’s bravery.*

The Messenger of God said: *Whoever drinks the ḥarmal for forty mornings every day in a certain measure, his heart shall be illuminated by wisdom, and he shall be cured from seventy-two maladies the least which is leprosy.*

(Trans. N. Hamed as slightly amended by me)

And this above is only the evidence from the extra-scriptural sources attributed to the holy figures of Islam, and not from the scientific and ethnobotanical sources of medieval *Islamicate* which offer far, far more.

Much more can be said, obviously, but I believe this here amply demonstrates the case beyond just the popular *meme* of Aladdin and his magic lamp. One issue to consider is that because certain levels and sectors of traditional Iranian society and culture have not been as thoroughly penetrated by the West (or, for that matter, even by modernized, secular Iranians) as the Amazonian one has, this does not prove any entheogenic *agnosia* on the part of high Iranian culture and civilization. In fact the evidence, whether from ancient antiquity to the present, proves diametrically the opposite. Let me make this point here, there are Sufīs in Iran today who partake of entheogens in ritualized settings and who claim such entheogenic substances, and the ceremonies adapted to them, to be knowledge passed down to them in uninterrupted chains of transmission reaching into distant

(pre-Islamic) antiquity while simultaneously validated in the Islamic present by sources such as the sayings quoted above. The Prophet Muḥammad's underscoring of the connection between the ingesting of *harmal* for forty days with wisdom (*ḥikma*) and illumination (*nūr*) -- both of which the Tradition elsewhere holds to be divine bestowals -- literally speaks to it.

3.

I haven't looked at Gayle Highpine's work too closely, but I will gladly offer my own perspective on this. I drank the Vine, the Ayahuasca, for about eight years. At the end of this period, within an Ayahuasca vision, I was instructed by the *Madre* to cease working with the Vine altogether and instead to return to the plant spirits of my own ancestors, namely, the *Esfand*, i.e. the Syrian Rue, *Haoma* (let us call it by its proper entheogenic name, please). It has been six years now since the last time I drank Vine. There are definitely qualitative differences on the experiential level between the Ayahuasca and Haoma. For one thing, I find the Haoma to be a far less possessive spirit than Ayahuasca is, and I have found the Haoma to allow for more freedom within the experience than what the Ayahuasca offers. One can change the proverbial channel if one wishes, as it were, whereas often times the Ayahuasca does not allow it. The purges are also much cleaner as well as decisive in the psychic contents expelled, and, unlike Ayahuasca, the Haoma will take out what needs to be taken out in one session and won't keep one hanging for a future session to resolve. Many of my sessions with Ayahuasca ended in visionary *aporias*, as it were. The Haoma is more straightforward that way. Also, just as some of the native shamans of the Amazon have admitted, Ayahuasca sometimes does lie. I have yet to experience the Haoma lying to me. The protective cocoon provided by the Haoma I have also found to be much stronger than the Ayahuasca's. To me, at least, the Haoma (the Rue) has proven itself to be the superior ally to the Ayahuasca (Vine). Remember also that the *Esfand*/Syrian Rue is the highest, most sacred apotropaic and protective, magical herb known to my people since distant antiquity. Whether it acts this way with me specifically because of my own Iranian pedigree is a good question, but I have had other people tell me the same thing as well.

That aside, my personal experience has been that the very same feminine higher Intelligence who guides and appeared to me in the Ayahuasca experience for eight years appears in the Haoma as well. For me, it has been one and the same Spirit, which proves that it is not the material plant which is the primary receptacle, receptor and determiner of the experiential horizons of the visionary content and its boundaries. Rather there is a higher Intelligence at work which is being invoked through the synergy of the plants, because these plants are theurgies and celestial portals to the higher Intelligence and its world(s). My personal point of view on the causality here is actually the reverse of what scientific positivist worldviews and similar posit, and that is, that the visionary space (or the Intelligence behind it, rather, i.e. the spirit of the plant) is the efficient cause of the material plant, which is actually this space or higher Intelligence's physical theurgy, and not the plant the cause of the visionary space or higher Intelligence as such. The synergy of the plants that constitutes the material sacrament merely evokes and invokes within the imbibor that epiphany that is otherwise *already-always* present beyond the veil of the spatiotemporal mundane. This point of view

*tout court* rejects those metaphysically unsophisticated, popular psychological reductionisms offered by the New Age and similar (who have ostensibly taken their viewpoint from a partially understood and half-digested Buddhism as mediated *via* the content of modern, usually pop, psychology) in order to explain the content of the entheogenic (or any other visionary) experience as such. We are dealing with a descending hierarchy of Intelligences and worlds, so let us not beat around the bush.

4.

First, I would direct people to chapter 32 of Stephen Beyer's *Singing to the Plants* (Albuquerque: 2009). Tourism being only a facet of it, to me, the current Ayahuasca industry in South America, as well as beyond it, has become in many ways the most recent chapter of grinding Western colonialism and the continuing infiltration of predatory capitalism, under various guises, into the assorted *lifeworlds* of the Global South. I guess this here is where my own emphasis slightly differs from Beyer's. Let me be frank about this and say, that we are in fact dealing with an *industry* in every sense of that word: an industry that on the level of finance and investment, infrastructure as well as commercialization, is thoroughly dominated by white middle-class Anglo-Europeans and their overall *weltanschauung* and interests. I would say that the Amerindian natives as the well as the Mestizo communities, even the Ayahuasca itself, in some cases, have to some extent come to be overshadowed by this ongoing, massive cultural appropriation of the spirituality, the plants and the traditional medicine of an indigenous civilization by the West. Add to this the fact that virtually all the current, self-appointed ideological gatekeepers of this industry are also predominantly represented by white middle-class Anglo-Europeans (whether in the Ivory Tower as academic specialists or on its peripheries in various alternative medias appealing to popular Western mainstream audiences, whether online or in the real world), and any honest reflection upon the situation proves this to be the case.

While some people look at the ideological incursions of various Western New Age paradigms and *praxis* into the traditional Amerindian and Mestizo spiritual *noosphere* of the Ayahuasca as a beneficent and even inevitable function of globalization; I personally look at the whole thing as an unmitigated disaster and an insidious development, but one consummately descriptive of the multifaceted mechanisms of Western colonialism. Yet it is not necessarily a *fait accompli* that the traditional culture needs to stoically adapt itself to and *tout court* blindly accept either. It should, and can, resist it. That massive corruption has crept into the tourism side of things, which in a few instances has been causing more and more fatalities with increasing frequency of late, is only the outcome and consequence of this escalating colonization of traditional Ayahuasca culture and its spiritual *noosphere* which is more and more sending the whole thing in South America off the rails; because once the cultural integrity of a given spiritual civilization is compromised and taken over by other forces, especially on the level of the *noosphere* (which seems to be the case with much of the popular Ayahuasca culture today), the first things to go are usually all the due diligent safeguards traditionally in place: safeguards that would, for instance, never allow either charlatans or amateurs with little to no long term training or experience to take

over as *curandero* shamans. Here money – and *gringo* money, specifically – has become the dominator, the wheel and thrust driving the corruption on the ground, and this to me is unambiguous evidence of a multifaceted colonial *brujeria* at work that must be tackled and undone in order to restore this spiritual culture's core integrity. Neither the forces of the New Age nor postmodernism, let alone the culture devouring Beast of industrial modernity, are to be taken as friends or allies in such a restorative endeavour. They are the problem. Likewise the NGOs and oil companies both are merely different facets of the same wrecking ball, with the NGOs as the trojan horses behind enemy lines (i.e. 'soft power') to the outright assaulting armies that are the oil companies breaking down the traditional walls. Both of these especially are the nefarious, front-line legions of Empire and need to be pushed back – and altogether out.

Moreover, those sincere spiritual seekers in the West who are searching for a genuine form of spiritual orientation and healing with Ayahuasca need to understand that such counter-productive (nay, quite dangerous) developments do not lend themselves to what they are ultimately seeking. Instead it is lending itself to the very opposite. Initiation, which a traditional Ayahuasca spirituality in its own unsullied context very much is, here becomes counter-initiation. Rather than providing an orientation towards spiritual awakening and liberation, it becomes bondage and maleficity instead; attempted healing turns into reinforced sickness, and so on. People who take such distinctions lightly, or try to brush them off as of no consequence, do so at their own peril, as we are now literally beginning to witness.

More can be said, but I would submit that those who are genuinely serious about the positive, transformative power of Ayahuasca in the West are not going to get anywhere – in fact they are only going to compound the problems for themselves as well as for the Traditional culture from which it emerged – if they continue to treat such downsides as anything else other than what they are. Sincere, collective and no-holds-barred introspection plus taking responsibility, and then followed by positive, concerted action, is what is called for; and only seasoned spiritual warriors who are already part of the existing Amerindian and Mestizo cultures will ultimately be able to solve the underlying issues fueling this and thereby bring the proverbial demon to heel. Both the *white perpetrator* and the *white saviour* (two sides of the same coin) need to get out of the picture entirely, or be made to do so, and the Ayahuasca profiteers – whether inside or outside of South America – need to be shown the door, with their profiteering permanently halted.

## 5.

The enchanted universe is something people need to experience for themselves without contemporary preconceptions about such things intruding or standing in the way as veils: preconceptions which are actually gross misconceptions regarding the nature of the universe itself (or, *multiverse*, rather). Modernized secular people have been *tout court* blinded to such dimensions and, in my opinion, by design. But merely reading about it will not necessarily convince anybody that magic and sorcery – the general sphere of the paranormal - are all around us or that these things are very real; all too real, in fact. Besides, the (post)modernist secular environment of Western *Globalistan*, with its straitjacketed scientism and epistemological flatland one-dimensionality, is not



exactly an environment conducive to genuinely understanding or grasping the reality of the metaphysical when the very ontology of this environment ever since Descartes, Kant and then the European Enlightenment has been to vigorously deny it with all might. The whole edifice of (post)modern society has been built upon and around banishing the paranormal and denying metaphysics from our realm altogether. In fact one could argue that the whole of (post)modern society is nothing but a form of black sorcery (*brujeria*) itself. Yet the paranormal and the metaphysical does not care, one way or another, with what kind of contempt or denial a wayward (post)modern humanity holds it in.

That stated, in the eternal words of Plato, such serious matters are generally not to be found in books. You have to feel it, see it, smell it, taste it, perceive and experience it for yourself, and usually this comes with either the effort of a deepened initiatic practice of some sort that gradually opens one up to the balanced understanding of such realities (by, first, decontaminating the mind from the brainwashing of social conditionings and psychological as well as epistemic traps) or spontaneously *via* other channels. But, in the context of this conversation, if I had to recommend any basic texts, outside of any corpus of actual occult grimoires, I would enthusiastically recommend Beyer's *Singing to the Plants* and Julius Evola's *Introduction to Magic* (Rochester: 2001), the latter especially for a few of the exercises provided in it that can both easily and safely be applied to any existing Tradition. And if people wish to see in print what the theory of an actually enchanted universe looks like in a Traditional setting, let them go to the whole corpus of the writings of Henry Corbin.

Entheogens are powerful tools precisely because they graphically demonstrate empirically to the perceiver, often dramatically and within the scope of a multidimensional unfolding, the utter vacuity of contemporary, flat-land ontologies of the world. This does not mean that entheogens are capable of unveiling truth or establishing fact in every given setting and circumstance for every perceiver at every given instance on demand (the inner *situs* and integrity of a given perceiver as visionary receptacle is also crucial to that specific end, in fact pivotally so, as every Tradition has forever maintained). But what they do in fact demonstrate beyond doubt is that there is far, far more to the world than common, material appearances reveal. If one begins from this basic axiom, and perseveres, the rest in time, guaranteed, will follow as one moves up the proverbial ladder.

Given this, both previous and recent objections that craft the entheogenic experience as mere hallucinations in fact misses many larger, intricate points. First of all, as yet there have been no concerted attempts in our times by secular institutions of higher learning at serious epistemological inquiries into the general nature of spiritual visions, its boundaries and demarcations, etc. We do not even possess a coherent theory of what constitutes a hallucination, let alone how visions are meant to be understood in a global theory of spiritual visions. Moreover, the methodology and larger perspective(s) involved would be key to unravelling the first, basic distinctions to be grasped and understood. But you cannot even begin to have this inquiry in any adequate way without an ontology and while insisting material causality is the only reality there is. Contemporary scientism, in its myopic disciplinary and culturally-bound, epistemic territorialities and intellectual gatekeeping, is grasping at philosophical straws here in its adamant denial of such a larger contextual field (i.e. ontology) in order to

approach such questions to begin with. This is why, in my opinion, those wannabe Richard Dawkins' now approaching the psychedelic world attempting to dismiss the entheogenic experience are as doomed to the same intellectual boondocks as their gurus Dawkins, Harris, et al., are increasingly being relegated to. They do not understand the intricacies of the bigger picture, nor do they believe it exists, nor do they possess the intellectual or deepened empirical tools and rigour or wherewithal to adequately and objectively assess any of it. They cannot even escape the limited straitjacket of material causality as such, yet deign to pontificate on the overall nature of things, and so are like those men turned to the walls in Plato's parable of the cave blinded by shadows and silhouettes which they take as all reality. They are, like Dawkins and company, the blind leading the blind, and just like Dawkins and company they fear involved philosophical inquiries which in the process may unpack all of their own partial assumptions, wrong presuppositions, and the very flaw in their methodology itself, especially as regards to the nature of how we know and, following from this, what the nature of *being* is.

## 6.

All existence is theophany and every theophany reflects a form, or *Image* rather (the *imago mundi*), to the intelligence of the heart which is its mirror and the locus of its manifestation. Now, the Godhead in its utter remote transcendence and the absolute totality of Its infinitude cannot be known or represented by anything, because *It* is beyond all categories of predication or apprehension: '*No vision perceives It, but It perceives all vision, for it is the Subtle, the All-Informed*' (*Qur'ān* 6:103). But the intelligence of the heart, what in Shi'ism is termed by the Imāms the '*aql*' (Hiero-Intelligence/Nexal Consciousness), can through mystical wayfaring indeed come to know the form, the eternal Image, within the individuated mirror of itself as reflected by theophany, such that this knowledge (or *noesis*) becomes the knowledge and apprehension of its own self. In Shi'ism the ultimate method to the attainment of this *noesis* is love (*ḥubb*) and its object is the Eternal Imām, which as hypostasis is also referred to as the Primal Will, the Pen, the Universal Intellect or the Muḥammadan Reality. The Eternal Imām is also interchangeable with the Fourteen Infallibles (i.e. Muḥammad, Fāṭima and the Twelve Imāms), whether individually or collectively. It is simultaneously both the supreme theophany of the Godhead as well as Its supreme veil, the Veil of Light, the Pleroma. Given this, a Shi'i version of the Delphic maxim would hold that, '*whosoever hath known their Self hath known their Imām Who is their Lord*'.

That said, there is a famous Shi'i version of a *ḥadīth qudsī* (an extra-Quranic saying of God), where God addresses the Prophet Muḥammad, saying: "*O Aḥmad* [i.e. Muḥammad], *were it not for you, I would not have created the universe; and were it not for 'Alī, I would not have created you; and were it not for Fāṭima, I would not have created either of you!*" If for the Shi'i Muslim, the mystery of the station of prophecy and messengerhood (*nubuwwaḥ*) is embodied by Muḥammad, who is the Seal of Prophets (*khāṭim al-nabīyyīn*), then the secret of this mystery is in the vicegerency or providential guidance (*walāya*) of 'Alī. Here both the mystery of the secret and the secret of the mystery are symbolically embodied by Fāṭima who is proclaimed in this *ḥadīth qudsī* to be the existential *raison d'être* of both, that is, the very purpose of the inner purpose to the most interior, animating intention of the creation of the universe: its supreme

pivoting mystery, as it were. Note that Fāṭima was once referred to by her illustrious father as “*the mother of her father*” (*umm abihā*). Elsewhere in esoteric Shi‘ism she has also been referred to as the *Creatrix* (*al-fāṭir*). As such, for a Shi‘i Muslim, total devotion to Fāṭima as the Divine Mother (closely analogous to how the *Theotokos* is taken by Eastern Orthodox Christianity) represents the acme of faith and its consummation.

Since the Celestial Earth has already been referred to above, Fāṭima here is the Super-Celestial Earth, the Earth of *lāhūt* (the pure divine realm). She is the Ocean of the Letter *ṣād* (ص) and the heavenly Lote-Tree beyond which there is no passing (*ṣidratu’l-muntahā*), the Tree of Life (*shajara al-ḥayyāt*), the Tree of Reality (*shajara al-ḥaqīqa*). She is the *Radiant* (*al-zahrā*) because she is Light (*nūr*) itself and the Wisdom (*ḥikma*) incarnate. She is the Sabbath because she is the pre-eternal Day of the Cosmic Book (*yawm al-kitāb*). Note also the connection of wisdom and light made above with the Syrian Rue and the correspondence of these attributes here with Fāṭima.

Now, in another famous *hadīth qudsī*, God is held to say, “*I was a Hidden Treasure and I desired to be known, therefore I created creation in order to be known.*” The word for desire here in Arabic is *ḥubb* which also, as shown above, denotes love which as an attribute in Shi‘ism is corresponded to *walāya*. The *ḥubb* of the hidden Godhead manifests in the realm-worlds generated below the *ipseity* as the instantiation of the *walāya* (the Eternal Imām) that forms, as it were, the highest Pleroma. Here in the symbolism of the theophany of persons, Fāṭima stands as the ‘*Hidden Treasure*’, ‘Alī as the divinity’s ‘*desire to be known*’ and Muḥammad as the ‘*creation of the world*’. Therefore, for a Shi‘i Muslim, to know and apprehend the supernal, divine reality of each *via* the intelligence of the heart, is to know what can be known of the Godhead in each of Its ascending and descending theophanies; and this, among other reasons too lengthy to get into here, is what I have meant by the feminine Godhead in the context of esoteric Shi‘i Islam.

Furthermore, for me personally, at least, the Islam of Shi‘ism is noetically completed within the intelligence of the heart of each believer once the assent is made to the theophanic divinity of Fāṭima *al-Zahrā*, because at such a point when this assent is made by the intelligence of the heart, the ‘*aql* attains its own integral *sophianity*, its *fāṭimīya*, which is the level of the super-consciousness as exemplified by the Earth of *lāhūt*. Of course in all of this here we are speaking from the level of pure symbolism and pneumatology, and what these symbols mean to a Shi‘i gnostic in the process of mystical wayfaring during the integration of the Muḥammad-of-one’s-being, the ‘Alī-of-one’s-being and, finally, the Fāṭima-of-one’s-being who manifests to the soul the face of divinity, the Supreme Horizon.